

THE METHODS OF MORIS KLAU

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WHERE a case did not touch his peculiar interests, appeals to Moris Klaw fell upon deaf ears. However dastardly a crime, if its details were of the sordid sort, he shrank within his Wapping curio shop as closely as any tortoise within its shell.

Sometimes, however, when Inspector Grimshaw, of Scotland Yard, was at a loss, he would induce me to intercede with the eccentric old dealer, and sometimes Moris Klaw would throw out a hint.

Such a case came under my personal notice on one occasion, and my friend Coram was instrumental in enlisting the services of Moris Klaw.

It was, I think, one of the most mysterious affairs with which I ever came in contact, and the better to understand it you must permit me to explain how Roger Paxton, the sculptor, came to have such a valuable thing in his studio as that which (as we all assumed) had inspired the strange statue.

It was Sir Melville Fennel, then, who commissioned Paxton to execute a chryselephantine statue. The commission came as something of a surprise. The art of chryselephantine sculpture, save for one attempt at revival in Belgium, has been dead for untold generations.

It is the ancient Greek method of finishing a statue with gold and ivory. Based upon designs furnished by the eccentric but wealthy baronet, the statue represented a slim and graceful girl reclining in an exhaustion upon an ebony throne.

The ivory face, with its wearily closed eyes, was a veritable triumph, and was surrounded by a headpiece of gold intertwined among a mass of disheveled hair. One ivory arm hung down so that the fingers almost touched the pedestal; the left hand was pressed to the breast as though against a throbbing heart.

Gold bracelets and anklets, furnished by Sir Melville, were introduced into the composition; and, despite the artist's protest, a heavy girdle encircled with gems that had been found in the tomb of some favorite of a long-dead pharaoh encircled the waist.

When complete the thing was, from a merely intrinsic point of view, worth several thousand pounds.

As the baronet had agreed to the exhibition of the statue prior to its removal to Fennel Hall, Paxton's star was seemingly in the ascendant. Then the singular thing occurred that threatened to bring about his ruin.

The sculptor gave one of the pleasant little dinners for which he had gained a reputation. We were quite a bachelor party, and I shall always remember the circle of admiring faces surrounding the figure of the reclining dancer—turned in the soft light to an almost uncanny semblance of fair flesh and blood.

"You see," explained Paxton, "this complete work, although it has latterly fallen into disrepute, affords magnificent scope for decorative purposes: such a richness of color can be obtained. The ornaments are genuine antiques and of great value—a fact of my patron's."

Coram, curator of the Menzies Museum, who up to the present had stood in silent contemplation of the figure, now spoke for the first time.

"The cost of materials is too great for this style of work ever to become popular," he averred. "That girdle, by the way, represents a small fortune and, together with anklets, armlets, and headpiece, might well tempt any burglar. What precautions do you take, Paxton?"

"Sleep out here every night," was the reply; "and there is always some one here in the daytime."

"Incidentally, a curious thing occurred last week. I had just fixed the girdle, which, I may explain, was once the property of Nicias, a favorite of Rameses III, and my model was alone here for a few minutes."

"As I was returning from the house, I heard her cry out, and when I came to look for her she was crouching in a corner trembling. What do you suppose had frightened her?"

"Give it up," said Harman. "She swore that Nicias—for the statue is supposed to represent her—had moved!"

"I fancy," continued Paxton, "that she must have heard some of the tales that have been circulated. The girdle has a rather peculiar history. It was discovered in the tomb of the dancer by whom it had once been worn, and it is said that an inscription was unearthed at the same time containing an account of Nicias' death under particularly horrible circumstances."

"Seton—you fellows know Seton—who was present at the opening of the sarcophagus, tells me that the Arabs, on catching sight of the girdle, all prostrated themselves and then took to their heels. Sir Melville Fennel's agent sent it on to England, however, and Sir Melville conceived the idea of this statue."

We were a very merry party, and the night was far advanced ere the gathering broke up. Coram and I were the last to depart, and having listened to the voices of Harman and the others dying away, we also prepared to take our leave.

"Just come with me as far as the studio," said Paxton, "and having seen that all's well, I'll let you out by the garden door."

Accordingly we donned our coats and hats, and followed our host to the end of the garden, where his studio was situated. The door unlocked, we all three stepped inside the place and gazed upon the figure of Nicias—the pallid face and arms seeming almost unearthly in the cold moonlight, wherein each jewel of the girdle and headpiece glittered strangely.

"How uncannily human it is. I don't entirely envy you your bed-chamber, old man," said Coram.

"Oh, I sleep well enough," laughed Paxton. "No luxury, though; just this

corner curtained off and a camp bedstead."

With that we parted, leaving the sculptor to his lonely vigil at the shrine of Nicias. As my rooms were no great distance away, some half-hour later I was in bed and asleep.

I little suspected that I had actually witnessed the commencement of one of the most amazing mysteries which ever cried out for the presence of Moris Klaw.

Some few minutes subsequent to retiring—or so it seemed to me; a longer time actually had elapsed—I was aroused by the ringing of my telephone bell.

I scrambled sleepily out of bed and ran to the instrument.

Coram was the caller. And, now fully awake, I listened with an ever-growing wonder to his account of that which had prompted him to ring me up.

Briefly it amounted to this: Some mysterious incident had aroused Paxton from his sleep. Seeking the cause of the disturbance, the artist had unlocked the studio door and gone out into the garden.

He was absent but a moment, and

arouse me, and the thing was a voice.

"A voice?" "It was, I suppose, about two hours after you had gone, and I was soundly asleep in the studio, when I suddenly awoke and sat up to listen—it seemed to me that I heard a cry immediately outside the door. It sounded more like the voice of a boy than that of a man, and it uttered but one word: 'Nicias!'"

"And then?" "I sprang on to the floor and stood for a moment in doubt—the thing seemed so uncanny."

"For possibly a minute I hesitated, and then, as I pulled the curtains

aside and stood by the door to listen, for the second time the cry was repeated, coming indisputably from immediately outside. Taking up my revolver which I have always kept handy since Nicias was completed, I unlocked the door and stepped out into the garden—"

He broke off. A vehicle, cab or car, was heard to draw up outside the house.

Coram sprang to the door. "Moris Klaw!" I cried. "Good morning, Mr. Coram!" said the strange voice from the darkness outside. "Good morning, Mr. Scarsles!" Moris Klaw entered.

Through his gold-rimmed glasses he peered into the shadows of the hall. His scanty, colorless beard appeared less adequate than ever to clothe the massive chin. The dim light rendered his race more cadaverous and more yellow even than usual.

"And this," he proceeded, as the anxious sculptor came forward, "is Mr. Paxton, who has lost his statue? Good morning, Mr. Paxton!"

He bowed, removing his bowler and revealing his great, high brow. Coram was about to relock the door.

"Ah, no!" Moris Klaw checked him. "My daughter is to come yet with my cushion."

Paxton stared, not comprehending; but stared yet harder when Isis Klaw appeared, carrying a huge red cushion.

"She was wrapped in a cloak which effectually concealed her lithe figure, and from the raised hood her darkly beautiful face looked out with bewitching effect. She divided between Coram and myself one of her dazzling smiles."

"It is Mr. Paxton," said her father, indicating the girl. "It is my daughter, Isis. Isis will help us to look for Nicias."

"I am awfully indebted to you. Won't you come in and sit down?" said Paxton, glancing at the girl in bewilderment.

"No, no!" replied Klaw; "let us stand. It is good to stand, and stand upright, for it is because he can do this that man is superior to the other animals."

Coram and I knew Klaw's mannerisms, but I could see that Paxton thought him to be a unique kind of lunatic.

Nevertheless, he narrated something of the foregoing up to the point reached at Moris Klaw's arrival.

"Proceed, slowly now," said Klaw. "You left the door open behind you?"

"Yes; but I was never more than ten yards from it. It would have been physically impossible for any one to remove the statue unknown to me. You must remember that it was no light weight."

"Correct, so far. Something did

The Ivory Statue

"One moment," I interrupted. "Are you sure that the statue was in its place before you came out?"

"Certain! There was a bright moon, and the figure was the first thing my eyes fell upon when I pulled the curtain aside."

"Did you touch it?" rumbled Moris Klaw.

"No. There was no occasion to do so."

"How much to be regretted, Mr. Paxton! The sense of touch is so exquisite a thing!"

"We all wondered at his words."

"Stepping just outside the door," Paxton resumed, "I looked to right

will the constable lodge information. Moreover, I withheld from him the object of my inquiries. If this business gets into the papers I shall be a ruined man!"

"I have hopes," Klaw assured him, "that it will get in no papers. Let us proceed, now, to the scene of these wonderful happenings. It is my custom, Mr. Paxton, to lay my old head down upon the scene of a mystery, and from the air I can sometimes recover the key to the labyrinth."

"So I have heard," said Paxton. "You have heard so, yes? You shall see! Lead on, Mr. Paxton! Lead on, Isis, my child, be careful that it

brushes against no object in passing—my oedically sterilized cushion!"

"We proceeded to the studio."

"I feel that I am responsible for dragging you here at this unearthly hour," said Paxton to Isis Klaw.

She turned her fine eyes upon him. "My father is indebted for the opportunity," she replied; "and since he has need of me, I am here. I, too, am indebted."

Her supreme self-possession and tone of finality silenced the artist. So far as I could see, everything in the studio was exactly as last I had seen it, save that Nicias' throne was vacant. The top of the statue was partially glazed, and Moris Klaw peered up at it earnestly.

"From above," he rumbled, "I should wish to look down into below. How do I reach it?"

"The only stepladder is that in the studio," answered Paxton. "I will bring it out."

He did so. The gray light of dawn was creeping into the sky, and against that somber background we watched Moris Klaw crawling about the roof like some giant spider.

"Did you find anything?" asked Paxton anxiously, as the investigator descended.

"I find what I look for," was the reply; "and no man is entitled to find more. Isis, my child, place that cushion in the ebony chair."

The girl stepped on the dais, and disposed the red cushion as directed.

"You see," explained Moris Klaw, "wherever has robbed you, Mr. Paxton, runs some one great danger, however clever his plans. There is, in every criminal scheme, one little point, that only fate can decide—either to hit or to smooth out—to bring success and riches or whistling poeem."

"Upon that so critical point his or her mind will concentrate at the critical moment. The critical moment, here was that of getting Nicias out of your studio."

"I sleep upon that throne where she reclined—the ivory dancer. This sensitive plate—he tapped his brow—will reproduce a negative of that critical moment as it seemed in the mind of the one we look for."

"Isis, return in the cab that waits and be here again at six o'clock."

He placed his quaint derby upon a table and laid beside it his black cloak. Then, a ramshackle figure in shabby tweed, he reclined upon the big ebony chair, his head against the cushion.

"Place my cloak about me, Isis."

"The girl did so."

"Good morning, my child. Good morning, Mr. Scarsles. Good morning, Mr. Coram, and Mr. Paxton."

He closed his eyes.

"Excuse me," began Paxton.

Isis placed a finger to her lips, and

signed to us to withdraw silently.

"Sh-h-h," she whispered; "he is asleep!"

At five minutes to six sounded Isis Klaw's ring upon the door bell.

Paxton, Coram and I had spent the interval in discussing the apparently supernatural happening which threatened to wreck the artist's ruin. We were asked before Paxton could question him.

"We admitted Isis, who wore now a smart tweed costume and a fashionable hat. Beyond doubt, Isis Klaw was strikingly beautiful."

At the door of the studio stood her father, staring straight up to the morning sky, as though by astrological arts he hoped to solve the mystery.

"What time does your model come?" he asked before Paxton could question him.

"Half past ten. But, Mr. Klaw—, began our anxious friend.

"Where does it lead to?" Klaw rumbled on, "that lane behind the studio?"

"Tradesmen's entrance to the next house."

"Whose house?" "Dr. Gleeson's."

"M. D.?" "Yes. But tell me, Mr. Klaw—, tell me, have you any clue?"

"My mind, Mr. Paxton, records for me that the statue was in its place, but I am not sure. You understand me, but walked! Plainly, I feel her go tipsy, tipsy, so silent and cautious!"

"She is concerned, this barbaric dancing girl who escapes from your studio, with two things. One is some very big man. She thinks, as she tipsy, of one very tall; six feet and three inches at least! So it is not of you she thinks, Mr. Paxton. We shall see of whom it is."

"Tell me the name of your acquaintance, the post policeman."

"We were all staring at Moris Klaw, spellbound with astonishment. But Paxton managed to mumble:

"James—Constable James."

"We shall seek him, this James, at the police station," rumbled Klaw. "Be silent, Mr. Paxton; let no one know of your loss. And hope."

"I can see no ground for hope!"

"My child," said Klaw to his daughter, "take the cushion and return. My negative is a clear one. You understand me. Perfectly," replied Isis with composure.

"Breakfast—" began Paxton, tentatively.

But Moris Klaw waved his hands and enveloped himself in the big cloak.

"There is no time for such gross matters," he said. "We are busy."

From the brown derby he took out a scent spray, and bedewed his high, bald forehead with verberna.

"It is exhausting, that odic photography," he explained.

Shortly afterward he and I walked around to the local police depot.

Arriving at the police station, "Shall I ask for Constable James?" I said.

"Ah, no," replied Klaw. "Is there the constable that he relieved at 12 o'clock I am looking."

Inquiry showed that the latter officer—his name was Freeman—had just entered the station.

Moris Klaw's questions elicited the following story, though its bearing upon the matter in hand was not evident to me.

Toward 12 o'clock, that is, shortly before Freeman was relieved, a man, supporting a woman, came down the street and entered the gate of Dr. Gleeson's house.

The woman was enveloped in a huge fur cloak which entirely concealed her face and figure, but from her feeble step the constable judged her to be ill.

Considering the lateness of the hour, also, he concluded that the case must be a serious one; he further supposed the sick woman to be resident in the neighborhood, since she came on foot.

He had begun to wonder at the length of the consultation when, nearly an hour later, the man appeared again from the shadows of the drive, still supporting the woman.

Pausing at the gateway, he had waved his hand to the policeman.

Constable Freeman ran across the road immediately.

"Fetch me a taxicab officer," said the stranger, supporting his companion and exhibiting much solicitude.

Freeman promptly ran to the corner of Beira road and returned with a cab from the all-night rank.

"Open the door," directed the man, who was a person of imposing height—some six feet three. Freeman averred.

"Ha, ha!" growled Moris Klaw—"six feet three? What a wonderful science!"

He seemed triumphant, but I was merely growing more nonplussed.

With that, carefully wrapping the cloak about the woman's figure, the big man took her up in his arms and placed her inside the cab. He only glanced the constable obtained being that a foot clad in a silk stocking she had apparently dropped her shoe.

Tenderly assisting her to a corner of the vehicle, the man, having said and whispered some word of encouragement in her ear, directed the cabman to drive to the Hotel Cecil.

"Do you give him your assistance?" asked Moris Klaw.

"No. He did not seem to require it."

"And the number of the cabman?"

Freeman fetched his notebook and supplied the required information.

"Thank you, Constable Freeman," said Klaw. "You are a very alert constable. Good morning, Constable Freeman."

Again satisfaction beamed from behind his companion's glasses. But to my eyes the darkness grew momentarily less penetrable.

For these inquiries bore upon matters which had occurred prior to 12 o'clock, and Coram, myself, and Paxton had seen the statue in its usual place considerably after midnight. My brain was in a turmoil.

Said Moris Klaw: "That cab was from the big garage at Brixton. We shall ring up the Brixton garage and learn where the man may be found. Perhaps, if Providence is with us—and Providence is with the right—he has not yet again left home."

From a public call office we rang up the garage and learned that the man we wanted was not due to report for duty until 10 o'clock.

We experienced some difficulty in obtaining his private address, but finally it was given to us. Thither we hastened and aroused the man from his bed.

"A big gentleman and a sick lady," said Moris Klaw—"they hired your cab from Dr. Gleeson's, near Beira road, at about 12 o'clock last night, and you drove them to the Cecil Hotel."

"No, sir. He changed the address afterward. I have been wondering why I drove him to 6a Rectory Grove, Old Town, Clapham."

"Was the lady by then recovered?"

"Partly, sir. I heard him talking to her. But he carried her into the house."

"Ah," said Moris Klaw, "there is much genius wasted; but what a great science is the science of the mind."

Many times Moris Klaw knocked upon the door of the house in Clapham, Old Town—a small one, standing well back from the roadway. Within he could hear some coughing.

Then the door was suddenly thrown open, and a man appeared who must

have stood some six feet three inches. He had finely chiseled features, was clean shaven, and wore a pince-nez.

Klaw said a thing that had a surprising effect.

"What?" rumbled. "Has Nina caught cold?"

The other glared with a sudden savagery coming into his eyes, fell back a step, and clutched his great data.

"Enough, Jean Colette!" said Moris Klaw. "You do not know me, but I know you. Attempt no tricks, or it is the police and not a middle-class, harmless old fool who will come. Enter, Jean! We follow!"

For a moment longer the big man hesitated, and I saw the shadows of alternate resolves passing across his fine features. Then clearly he saw that surrender was inevitable, shrugged his shoulders, and stared hard at Klaw.

"Enter, messieurs," he said, with a marked French accent.

He said no more, but led the way into a long, bare room at the rear of the house.

Glancing rapidly around him, Moris Klaw asked:

"Where is it?" "The man's face was a study as he stood before us looking from one to the other. Then a smile, indescribably winning, played around his lips. "You are very clever, and I know now I am beaten," he remarked, "but had you come four hours later it would have been one hour too late."

He strode up the room to where a screen stood, and, seizing it by the top, hurled it to the ground.

Behind, on a model's dais, reclined the statue of Nicias in a low chair!

"You have already removed the girdle and one of the anklets," rumbled Klaw. "This was true. Indeed, it now became evident that the man had been interrupted in his task by our arrival. Opening a leather case that stood upon the floor by the dais, he produced the missing ornaments."

"What action is to be taken, monsieur?" he asked quietly.

"No action, Jean," replied Moris Klaw. "It is impossible for you see. But why did you delay so long?"

The other's reply was unexpected.

"It is a task demanding much time and care if the statue is not to be ruined, otherwise I should have performed it in Mr. Paxton's studio instead of going to the trouble of removing the figure. And Nina's condition has caused me grave anxiety throughout the night."

He stared hard at Moris Klaw. We could hear the sound of coughing from some room hard by.

"Who are you, monsieur?" he asked pointedly.

"An old fool who knew Nina when she posed at Julien's, Jean," was the reply; "and who knew you, also, in Paris."

Coram, myself, and Moris Klaw sat in Paxton's studio, and all of us gazed reflectively at the recovered statue.

"It was so evident," explained Klaw, "that since you were absent from here but thirty seconds, for anyone to have removed the statue during that time was out of the question."

"But some one did—"

"Not during that time," rumbled Moris Klaw. "Nicias was removed while you all made merry within the house."

"But, my dear Mr. Klaw, Scarsles, Coram, and I saw the statue long after that—some time about one o'clock."

"Wrong, my friend! You saw the model."

"What! Nina?"

"Mme. Colette, whom you knew in Paris as Nina—yes! Listen: About midnight, when your party is enabled together, comes one Jean Colette, a clever scamp from that metropolis of such perverted genius—Paris. Into Dr. Gleeson's he goes, supporting madame—your model. This is seen by Constable Freeman."

"When the trees hide them they climb over the fence into the lane and over the wall to the studio key. Nina has a cast of the studio key. How easy for her to get it!"

"Jean, a clever rogue with his hands, and a man who promised to be, once, a great artist, detaches the figure from the throne and arranges it as madame—in madame's outer garb. Beneath her cloak madame is Nicias—with copies of the jewels and all complete."

"He is clever, this Jean. He is, too, a man of vast strength—a modern Crotonian Milo. Not only does he carry that great figure of the statue into the studio, lifts it over the wall—did madame assist?—and into Dr. Gleeson's drive."

"He bears it to the gate, wrapped in Nina's fur. He calls a policeman. Ah, genius is here! He gives the wrong address. He is as cool as an orange."

"Do they escape now? Not so! He says that you find Nicias missing, will apply to the post policeman and get hold upon a thread. He says: 'I will make it appear that the robbery took place at a later time. I will thus have the police on my side. Another policeman will be on duty when the discovery is made: he will know nothing. He leaves Nina to pretend to be Nicias.'"

"Ah, such has courage, but her fears are many. Most of all she dreads that you will touch her. You do not. And Jean, the ivory statue safe at Clapham, returns for Nina. He comes into the doctor's drive, and the father gets where the post policeman cannot see him. He wears rubber shoes. He mounts to the studio roof. He lies flat upon the ledge above the door. His voice is falsetto. He calls Nicias."

"Presently you come out. You peep over the wall. Ah, out, also, is madame! She stretches up her white arms—so like the real ivory—she stretches down her steel hands. He raises her beside him."